

BOOK REVIEWS

Accomplices of Silence

The Modern Japanese Novel

by Masao Miyoshi

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Miyoshi closely analyzes six representative novelists within a general context that considers Japanese cultural interaction with the novel defined as an imported Western form. The writers are Futabatei Shimei, Mori Ōgai, and Natsume Sōseki of the Meiji and early Taishō eras; and Kawabata Yasunari, Dazai Osamu, and Mishima Yukio of the Hirohito (Shōwa) years. Miyoshi reveals structural characteristics of the Japanese novel, as well as more abstract thematic consequences of cultural importation. He also examines the often traumatic role played by the authors' own lives in the process.

We are introduced to Futabatei, whose *Ukigumo* (*The Drifting Clouds*), published in parts and serialized between 1887 and 1889, is considered to be the first modern Japanese novel, in the context of the contemporary *gem-bun'itchi* movement. Its proponents advocated bringing written and spoken modes of discourse closer together in Japan, in extreme cases proposing the adoption of the Roman alphabet and even the abolition of Japanese altogether in favor of English. Sociocultural factors embed-

ded in Japanese culminate in an ultimate "passion for silence" (xv) that Miyoshi argues accounts for a "death wish operating throughout modern Japanese literature" (178). Mishima's public harakiri is, of course, the most notorious instance of this impulse to self-sacrifice, but he shares the trait with Kawabata and Dazai, along with an abundance of others: the editor of a special literary number inspired by the Mishima incident reckoned the suicide rate for Japanese writers to be three hundred times higher than that of the rest of the population.

Miyoshi's aesthetics in his concentrated readings and his aim to demonstrate both the successes and failures of the Japanese novel refer consistently to closely related points of cultural and linguistic differential. Variability in Japanese tense contributes to temporal disorientation and a sense of existential "drifting" in Futabatei's *The Drifting Clouds* and to Sōseki's masterly temporal play in the "haiku novel" *Pillow of Grass* (*Kusamakura*, 1906). The syntactical flexibility of the original Japanese version of *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni*, 1937) magnifies Kawabata's blending of human incidents into the passage of time. The implication is that Kawabata's innovative approach to the novel, with its opposition to a plot logic of cause, effect, and moral consequence, stems from Japanese elements extraneous to the Western form. Similarly, Sōseki's

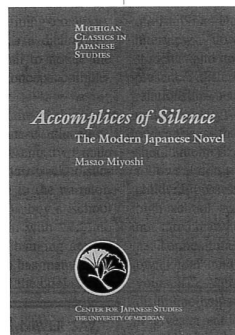
Pillow of Grass employs a unique visual effect that contributes to the painterly quality of its narrative (the narrator is, in fact, an artist). Some passages need to "be seen, not heard, to be understood" (64), due to very obscure Chinese characters that few of its Japanese speaking readers would be able to pronounce.

Miyoshi finds a persistent source of difficulty for the Japanese novel—and, indeed, for Japanese novelists—in what he describes as a rigidly hierarchical, strictly role-defined society and a consequent "poverty of real content in Japanese life" (178). Japanese society, he argues, represses the development of individual personality that is by definition a prerequisite for the novelistic imagination as well as nurture for characters and authors alike. Paradoxically, the Japanese autobiographical genre of the "I-novel" or *shi-shōsetsu* evolves out of this very factor, substituting the author's private world for what is traditionally a network of relationships among individuals. For Miyoshi, however, the I-novel generally suffers as a type of novel for its dearth of clear personalities. He observes in it a paradigm for the literary suicide phenomenon: once the writer's life is mined of its content, suicide offers the only alternative to nauseating redundancy.

It would not seem fair to judge Miyoshi for his recourse in 1974, when the book was originally published, to what these days attracts criticism as an ideologically conditioned view of Japanese society as uniquely homogeneous and anti-individualistic. In his subsequent *Off Center: Power and Culture Relations Between Japan and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1991) and with *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), coedited with H. D. Harootyan, Miyoshi proves himself a leading figure in the quest to forge a culturally conscious critical framework, one "decentered" from a Western perspective. For educators about Asia, a minor point of caution might be advised here not simply to transmit the stereotypes that surface in places, signposted but not explicated as "myth." In the broader context, Miyoshi's book remains a *tour de force* in an ongoing intellectual program to understand Japanese culture and its complex relation to the West, fully warranting its present inclusion in a series of "classics" in Japanese studies. ■

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Pacific Passage

The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century

Warren I. Cohen, ed.

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1996
407 PAGES + CHAPTER ENDNOTES + INDEX

C an debates over the "research agenda" of American and Asian historians of U.S. relations with East and Southeast Asian countries stimulate college students' critical thinking skills? Yes! Lively reviews of trends in transregional historiography can support the learning objectives of upper-division international history, comparative foreign policy, or Vietnam War courses. Discussions and debates outlined in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century* provide such an opportunity.

Pacific Passage reviews "the accomplishments" of international historians since the early 1980s and proposes a collective "research agenda" for the coming decade (xvii). Regrouping chapter themes by the following authors, I would assign them in a sequence differing from that in *Pacific Passage*: United States relations with China by Jian Chen, et al.; "U.S.-Philippines relations since 1898" by Glenn Anthony May; "Japanese scholarship on U.S. involvement in East Asia" by Tadashi Aruga; "Japan and Korea, 1900-45," by Michael A. Barnhart; "Korea since World War II" by Bruce Cumings; "U.S.-Japan relations during 1945-70" by Marc Gallicchio; "U.S.-Vietnam relations and the Vietnam War" by Robert J. McMahon; and "Russian international historiography since the mid-1980s" by Constantine V. Pleshakov. The inclusion of chapters on U.S. relations with Vietnam and the Philippines suggests that "East Asian" in the subtitle of *Pacific Passage* would better have been expanded so as regionally to refer to those two "Southeast Asian" countries, as well.

Teachers concerned with enhancing students' critical thinking skills may integrate chapters from *Pacific Passage* into their undergraduate courses in the following four ways: First, although the coauthors do not share a common theoretical framework, methodologically they prefer multilingual, multi-archival investigation. Their chapter endnotes yield a wealth of citations to works in English, as well as in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian. On the one hand, the instructor may illustrate types of historical reasoning by referring to those citations which support claims and inferences made by the fifteen coauthors. On the other hand, the instructor may use chapter endnotes to introduce students to perspectives divergent from those articulated by the authors. Some citations may also suggest additional assigned readings or works to be consulted in preparing lectures and discussion notes. Meanwhile, students should be encouraged to use the index as a gateway for broader exploration of themes cutting across individual chapters of *Pacific Passage*, and students in courses assigning the entire volume might be asked to evaluate Warren I.

Cohen's introduction and Ernest R. May's epilogue.

Second, the historiographic "research agenda" (xviii) is elastic, that is, susceptible to being stretched to fit competing political purposes. Indeed, this agenda often reflects domestic governmental priorities not only in the U.S., but also in China, Japan and elsewhere. Thus, even "the definition and periodization of historical fields are always problematic," according to William C. Kirby (163), partly because the focused time frames (periods) may reflect the needs, problems, and accomplishments of a government at particular historical junctures. In a more specific criticism, Bruce Cumings wonders why presumably independent academics express "uncritical enthusiasm" over "the immense sacrifice that the Korean people made to drag their country into the late twentieth century" (360).

By highlighting appropriate references in chapters 1-3, 7, 9-11 and 13 of *Pacific Passage*, teachers can show how historical research sometimes depends on the availability of secret documents while also underscoring important inferences made from open-source materials. Some students may be inspired by the ingenuity of scholars who make new inquiries or challenge answers to once-settled questions. Surprisingly, the potentially proactive role of historians in triggering Freedom of Information Act requests is not mentioned.

Third, *Pacific Passage* introduces undergraduates to the notion that bilateral and trilateral U.S. relations are often poorly understood if one only considers the perspectives of American political, diplomatic or military leaders, that is, as if "the government" always has had a unified set of preferences or as if the government is always the only American institution affecting U.S. relations with countries in East and Southeast Asia. To cite a few examples, the reader is introduced to relevant perspectives of students (9), teachers (40-41), traders (121-24), women missionaries (130-31), newspaper reporters (24, 132, 154) and priests freelancing as pre-Pearl Harbor diplomatic interlocutors (52, 194). Chapters by Charles W. Hayford on "Chinese-American Cultural Relations, 1900-45" and Gordon Chang on "Asian Immigrants and American Foreign Relations" provide a counterpoint to state-centric analyses of foreign policy. The domestic politics of governmental foreign policy, i.e., the external affairs preferences of governmental officials, receives attention, as do other dimensions of society-to-society foreign relations. Professor Chang claims that "the Second World War appears to be a turning point in the study of America-East Asia relations." Chang continues, "The classic studies of the war in the Pacific, its causes, and its aftermath that were completed in the immediate postwar period gave relatively little attention to the immigration question or even to its legacy in American-East Asian relations" (106).

One might also look for additional links between a country's internal politics and its external relations with other governments. For example, students might be assigned to assess and discuss the changing impact of newspapers, film, radio, television, and most recently, the Internet, on United States relations with governments and societies in East and Southeast Asia. Ernest R. May is the only contributor to *Pacific Passage* to mention "the continuing revolution in telecommunications" (383-84) in relation to the development of U.S. foreign policy.

Fourth, essays in *Pacific Passage* suggest, in turn, how "modern-